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PSYCHOLOGICAL KIDNAPPING IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS: A CASE STUDY OF A TEENAGER AND CLINICAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract: Psychological kidnapping, a popular expression that describes a pattern of interpersonal abuse, is characterized by the progressive erosion of subjective autonomy through humiliation, cognitive manipulation, gaslighting, emotional invalidation, and social isolation. Although it is not a formal diagnosis, it brings together widely discussed elements that prove psychological violence and coercive control. This study seeks to systematize the concept, identify clinical and neurobiological markers described by stress neuroscience, propose a structured screening instrument, and analyze profiles associated with perpetrators and victims. It also includes a case study of an adolescent whose vulnerability stems from a family context marked by early rejection, pointing to the practical usefulness of the proposed model. Finally, the psychological consequences, the neurobiological remodeling observed in chronic stress, and the legal framework in different legislations are discussed, with an emphasis on Brazil, Portugal, and the United Kingdom.

Keywords: Psychological violence; Coercive control; Gaslighting; Neuroscience of stress; Criminal law.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of compulsory coexistence between adolescent relatives, the alternation of derogatory criticism with praise directed at sensitive targets of self-image constitutes a cycle of manipulation that erodes judgment, agency, and social belonging. In the case under analysis, blood ties and daily sharing of school spaces sustain the repetition of messages that induce perceptual doubt, invalidate affections, and restrict initiatives of autonomy, even when the victim retains partial awareness of the manipulative intention. The literature describes this arrangement under labels such as emotional abuse, gaslighting, and coercive control, drawing attention to the low detec-

tability of the pattern when mediated by ambiguous language, narrative inversions, and strategic positive reinforcements, especially in non-marital and highly interdependent relationships. These characteristics justify the descriptive use of the term psychological kidnapping to delimit a cumulative mode of relational imprisonment that is maintained by the subtle repetition of communicational acts and by the practical impossibility of immediate removal. (Darke et al., 2025; Ruíz, 2020).

In conceptual terms, gaslighting ceases to be merely an interpersonal tactic and begins to incorporate normative and contextual dimensions that reinforce asymmetries, which explains its effectiveness in environments where social surveillance is continuous and emotional bonds precede conflict. The public definition of the phenomenon shows variation and noise, even among victims and professionals, a factor that contributes to the normalization of abuse when masked by selective compliments, derogatory humor, and specific factual distortions. These elements appear in the present case as a means of maintaining the bond and inhibiting alternative support networks. (Darke et al., 2025; Ruíz, 2020).

The continuity of the social stressor triggers neurobiological pathways of adaptation that, when maintained, remodel emotional processing and executive control. The literature on chronic stress describes amygdala hyperreactivity, hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis dysfunction, and impairments in prefrontal circuits involved in conflict monitoring, decision-making, and behavioral inhibition, which reduces cognitive flexibility and increases rumination, hypervigilance, and affective lability. These mechanisms are consistent with the presentation observed in adolescents subjected to prolonged psychological violence in unavoidable social environments (McEwen, 2007; Teicher; Samson, 2016).

From a psychosocial perspective, patter-

ns of ridicule, invalidation, and isolation are associated with a higher likelihood of anxiety and depressive symptoms throughout development, with an emphasis on contexts where abuse is invisible and chronic. Language plays a central role in this process, with discursive markers that shift references to reality, trigger guilt, and induce self-surveillance, as described in linguistic studies of gaslighting. These findings guide the present investigation and support the need for structured screening in family and school settings. (Taillieu et al., 2016; Ghaltakhchyan, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a single-case design, with a clinical-qualitative approach and descriptive quantitative support for screening manipulative patterns. The focus is on the relational dynamics experienced by an adolescent in family and school settings, with an analysis of communication organization, markers of control, and the subjective experience of relational imprisonment (). The conceptual framework considers contemporary literature on gaslighting in its interpersonal and structural dimensions, used here as a matrix to classify practices of manipulation and invalidation in contexts of emotional closeness.

The participant is a teenager in puberty, who regularly interacts with the aggressors and has a history of emotional frustrations within the family. The information presented was obtained through clinical interviews with the participant and her legal guardian, analysis of written reports, and school documents provided with formal authorization. The material was completely anonymized, with the removal of proper names, locations, and identifiable marks.

The screening of patterns was performed using the Relational Dynamics Inventory, an authorial instrument consisting of 15 items on a five-point ordinal scale that synthesizes five

central theoretical axes: criticism and humiliation, restriction of choices, social isolation, emotional invalidation, and cognitive manipulation. The total score, ranging from 0 to 60, serves as a cumulative severity index. In the case analyzed, the participant obtained 42 points, consistent with ongoing harmful psychological dynamics. The classification served as a screening tool to guide the clinical description and interpretation of the reported episodes, without the intention of making a psychopathological diagnosis.

Data analysis followed a thematic logic with open, axial, and selective coding, seeking convergence between reports, documents, and inventory indicators. The internal consistency of the case was inspected by triangulation between sources, control of factual contradictions, and traceability of inferences. To organize the psychobiological dimension of the findings, a neurodevelopmental framework of chronic adversity was adopted, with attention to frontolimbic circuits and markers compatible with changes in stress regulation described in the literature on child and adolescent maltreatment.

Ethical procedures included free and informed consent from the legal guardian and assent from the participant, authorization for scientific use of anonymized information, and safeguarding of confidentiality. No clinical interventions were applied in the context of this study. The case was conducted according to good clinical reporting practices, adhering to principles of privacy and risk minimization. Written consent was obtained from the participant and free and informed consent from the legal guardian specifically for the publication of anonymized clinical information in a scientific journal.

Use of AI tools. AI-based tools were used exclusively for: a) supporting the bibliographic search strategy, with manual verification of relevance, full text, and DOI; b) linguis-

tic review of Portuguese according to ABNT standards. Conceptual decisions, instrument construction, data collection, clinical interpretation, and substantive writing of the study are the responsibility of the author. The references cited were checked in the archive and collated with their respective valid DOIs.

CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION

Psychological kidnapping is understood as a communicational and relational arrangement that, through repetition, disrupts the victim's perceptual confidence, lowers their self-esteem, and induces emotional dependence, even without overt physical violence. The phenomenon combines practices described as gaslighting and continued emotional abuse, with an emphasis on narrative inversions, invalidation of affective states, and selective positive reinforcement that maintains the bond when there is a prior bond of closeness. Studies indicate that the population recognizes traits of this pattern, although there is still definitional instability and low sensitivity to identify it in its ambiguous forms, especially in non-marital relationships of inevitable coexistence. This situation justifies the use of the term psychological kidnapping as a descriptive category for cumulative dynamics of relational imprisonment sustained by language and everyday social control (DARKE; PATERSON; VAN GOLDE, 2025; RUÍZ, 2020).

At the neurobiological level, repeated exposure to relational stressors overregulates the amygdala, alters the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, and reduces the effectiveness of dorsolateral prefrontal control, a condition compatible with threat bias, rumination, and decline in autonomous judgment in adolescents under chronic psychological violence. This mechanism explains the clinical trajectory of social withdrawal, emotional lability, and a tendency toward strategic submission

to the aggressor's commands when removal is not feasible in the short term, as in family and school contexts (MCEWEN, 2007; TEICHER; SAMSON, 2016).

CONDITIONS OF OCCURRENCE

The dynamics analyzed are rooted in inevitable social ties, extended family, and school, with power asymmetry sustained by repeated derogatory comments, reinterpretations of facts, and alternating hostility with selective validation. The bond persists even when the adolescent recognizes the manipulative intent, as daily proximity limits avenues for escape and reinforces emotional dependence. The pattern becomes functional when small distortions begin to organize the interaction, for example, compliments directed at appearance at social events followed by disqualification of personal interests in private contexts, which favors intermittent reinforcement and relational adherence. This organization corresponds to what the literature describes as manipulation that aims to destabilize self-confidence and the perception of reality in relationships with power imbalances, a phenomenon whose public identification is inconsistent and often diluted by the imprecise use of the term gaslighting, requiring criteria that consider repetition, intention, and outcomes in the victim (DARKE et al., 2025).

In cultural and structural terms, labels and narratives can operate as instruments of systematic invalidation, amplifying the difficulty of recognition in environments of emotional proximity (Ruíz, 2020). The progression of relational imprisonment has observable stages, with an initial phase of attraction and acceptance, followed by the integration of routines and, finally, the consolidation of control, a dynamic compatible with models of "psychological kidnapping" described in gradual interpersonal processes (Xu et al., 2017). From a biological perspective, chronic exposure to

relational stressors modulates frontolimbic circuits and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, reducing regulatory flexibility and favoring responses of submission due to emotional cost savings, which maintains the bond even in the presence of critical awareness of manipulation (McEwen, 2007; Teicher; Samson, 2016).

IDENTIFICATION CRITERIA

Clinical characterization requires convergence between narrative, observable factors, and functional markers. In this case, the victim's lack of emotional attention from her mother constitutes a vulnerability that increases insecurity and the search for acceptance. The adolescent reports her father as a figure of co-regulation and cognitive reference, describing him as the only one who understands and helps her; this support sustains her awareness of the manipulative nature of her interactions with A1 and A2 and provides a basis for naming the abuse without losing her sense of reality. The maintenance of the bond with A1 and A2 does not stem from adherence to their narratives, but from the need to belong in a context of inevitable coexistence, a scarcity of relational alternatives, and intermittent reinforcement through strategic compliments directed at appearance, alternating with private disqualifications. In this framework, repeated criticism that reduces personal value, invalidation of emotional states by labeling them as exaggerated, self-serving reinterpretation of events, and induction of guilt in the face of attempts at autonomy comprise a cumulative course compatible with contemporary descriptions of gaslighting in close non-marital relationships. The literature indicates that public recognition of the phenomenon is unstable and context-dependent, which reinforces the need for criteria that consider repetition, power asymmetry, and outcomes on the self; in trajectories with previous emotional abu-

se, the combination of manipulative language and continuous social stress favors hypervigilance and relational dependence, even when knowledge of the aggressor's intention persists. The neurobiological framework of chronic stress explains the coexistence of lucidity and relational imprisonment through amygdala hyperreactivity, alterations in the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, and reduced prefrontal control efficiency, especially in adolescence. Parental support acts as a regulatory and cognitive counterbalance, reducing the immediate emotional cost of confronting abuse and anchoring gradual coping strategies. (DARKE; PATERSON; VAN GOLDE, 2025; RUÍZ, 2020; TAILLIEU et al., 2016; MCEWEN, 2007; TEICHER; SAMSON, 2016; XU et al., 2017).

PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

In the case described, manipulation is not limited to direct depreciation. In social situations, compliments about appearance function as contingent positive reinforcement, followed by private disqualifications of the adolescent's interests and preferences, which maintains emotional closeness under a regime of intermittent reward and undermines self-confidence. There are biased reinterpretations of events, including denial of evidence reported by the victim, induction of guilt in the face of attempts at autonomy, and systematic discouragement of new bonds. When the adolescent establishes promising external contact, A1 and A2 appropriate the new friendship and deliberately reduce opportunities for socialization. The immediate result is behavioral withdrawal with partial preservation of judgment about manipulative intent, supported by the co-regulation offered by the father, who welcomes complaints, validates subjective experience, and serves as a cognitive reference for naming occurrences. At the same time, the history of absence of ma-

ternal emotional attention increases the need for acceptance and sensitivity to praise about valued attributes, which facilitates the maintenance of the bond even when the adolescent recognizes the communicational distortion. Findings from the literature help to interpret this sequence: studies on public perception of gaslighting show variability in the ability to recognize covert manipulation in contexts of proximity; linguistic analyses describe markers of invalidation and narrative reversal that shift the frame of reference of reality; population studies associate emotional abuse in childhood with a higher risk of internalizing symptoms in adolescence; chronic stress models explain the combination of hypervigilance, affective lability, and reduced executive control by amygdala hyperreactivity, hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis dysfunction, and reduced prefrontal regulation efficiency (DARKE; PATERSON; VAN GOLDE, 2025; GHALTAKHCHYAN, 2024; TAILLIEU et al., 2016; MCEWEN, 2007; TEICHER; SAMSON, 2016).

PROPOSED SCREENING TOOL

We propose the Relational Dynamics Inventory, a self-report designed to map patterns of psychological hijacking in friendships, family relationships, and school environments where coexistence is inevitable. The structure encompasses five dimensions derived from the literature and the case: criticism and humiliation, curtailment of choices and autonomy, social isolation, emotional invalidation, and cognitive manipulation supported by factual distortions and strategic compliments. The explicit use of positive reinforcement is part of the construct because it reflects a recurring tactic in non-marital and high-proximity gaslighting, as observed in interactions with A1 and A2, especially in social contexts where appearance is valued, followed by private disqualifications of interests and preferences.

Conceptual and empirical evidence on public recognition of gaslighting and its linguistic markers supports the inclusion of these dimensions, with an emphasis on low detectability when there is alternation between approval and devaluation and on the need for clear operational descriptors for screening (DARKE; PATERSON; VAN GOLDE, 2025; GHALTAKHCHYAN, 2024; RUÍZ, 2020).

The response is ordinal on a five-point scale, from 0 (never) to 4 (always), with a sum between 0 and 60. Suggested interpretive ranges: 0–14 functional relationship with no signs of risk; 15–29 attention zone with need for monitoring; 30–44 strong evidence of harmful psychological dynamics; 45–60 consolidated pattern of psychological hijacking. In the case presented, the score of 42 places the adolescent at the upper limit of strong evidence and very close to consolidation. This reading indicates a risk of chronicity, given the regular coexistence with the aggressors, the absence of a consistent alternative network, and the history of lack of maternal emotional attention, a variable that increases insecurity and the need for acceptance, maintaining the bond even in the presence of awareness of the abuse. At the same time, the paternal reference acts as a basis for co-regulation and confirmation of the experience, favoring the naming of events and reducing doubts induced by distortions. The literature on emotional abuse and chronic stress helps to interpret the risk profile captured by the inventory, associating repeated invalidation and isolation with internalizing symptoms and alterations in stress and executive control systems, with amygdala hyperreactivity, modulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, and reduced prefrontal regulation efficacy (TAILLIEU et al., 2016; MCEWEN, 2007; TEICHER; SAMSON, 2016).

In practical application, it is recommended that the score be used as a screening tool ac-

accompanied by a detailed clinical description and convergence with documents and reports. The inventory was designed for non-marital contexts of high social contiguity, with items that capture both explicit negative acts and the maintenance of bonds through positive reinforcement, such as selective praise for valued attributes. The case illustrates the adequacy of the model: prolonged coexistence with A1 and A2, intimate knowledge of historical vulnerabilities related to appearance and hair, episodes of appropriation of new friendships and blocking of socialization opportunities, as well as oscillation between public praise and private disqualification, a typical pattern of communicational control described for gaslighting in close relationships (DARKE; PATERSON; VAN GOLDE, 2025; RUÍZ, 2020).

ASSOCIATED PROFILES

In aggressors, reports of low parental affective responsiveness with father estrangement and maternal clinical anxiety set the stage for attachment insecurity and self-esteem regulation through interpersonal control. In consanguineous peers of the same age, this combination tends to produce alternating public approval and private depreciation, appropriation of emerging bonds, and induction of guilt- s strategies for maintaining local superiority. Quantitative syntheses support the association between attachment insecurity and perpetration of abuse in close relationships, while meta-analysis on narcissism and interpersonal violence describes a pattern of exploitation and disqualification consistent with that observed in the family nucleus analyzed. The reading here is interpretive, without diagnostic imputation, and explains the stability of control in an environment of inevitable coexistence. (KNOX et al., 2023; OLIVER et al., 2023).

Communicational markers reinforce this architecture. In contexts of proximity, gasli-

ghting operates through narrative inversions, invalidation of affective states, and the use of selective praise for valued attributes, which hinders public detection and shifts the victim's frame of reference for reality. Studies with lay populations show variation in the recognition of the phenomenon, and linguistic analyses detail resources that stabilize doubt and self-surveillance, aspects that appear in the case in question with interested reinterpretation of events and oscillation between social compliments and private disqualifications. (DARKE; PATERSON; VAN GOLDE, 2025; GHAL-TAKHCHYAN, 2024; RUÍZ, 2020).

In the victim, the absence of maternal emotional attention acts as a vulnerability axis and increases the need for acceptance, while the father fulfills the role of co-regulation and cognitive reference, validating complaints and sustaining awareness of the abuse. Population evidence links emotional abuse in childhood to a higher risk of internalizing symptoms and tolerance to devaluing interactions in adolescence, which favors remaining in harmful relationships even with preserved reality testing. Neuroscience models of stress describe the maintenance mechanism: amygdala hyperreactivity, modulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, and reduced prefrontal control efficiency, a combination that explains hypervigilance, affective lability, and defensive decisions that prioritize immediate belonging over autonomy. (TAILLIEU et al., 2016; MCEWEN, 2007; TEICHER; SAMSON, 2016).

To preserve anonymity, the aggressors will be referred to as sisters A1 and A2, with A1 being the oldest. Both act in a coordinated manner against the victim, alternating roles and reinforcing each other in their interactions, which constitutes a family coalition and increases social pressure in the household. Identification by neutral codes maintains the focus on the communication and bonding

mechanisms described, reduces the risk of personal recognition, and ensures the ethical integrity of the report.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND NEUROBIOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

Continued exposure to invalidation, distortion of facts, and interpersonal control tends to amplify internalizing symptoms in adolescents, with increased anxiety, depressive mood, hypervigilance, rumination, sleep disturbances, and decreased concentration. Population evidence indicates that emotional abuse is associated with a higher probability of multiple mental disorders throughout life, even after controlling for covariates and family co-occurrences, which supports the notion of cumulative damage when violence is primarily psychological. (TAILLIEU et al., 2016)

At the cerebral level, the maintenance of social stressors activates adaptation pathways that, when persistent, remodel limbic and prefrontal systems. Integrative reports describe amygdala hyperreactivity, hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis dysfunction, and reduced efficiency of executive control networks, a combination consistent with attentional bias toward threat, affective lability, and reduced cognitive flexibility in adolescents under chronic psychological violence. (MCEWEN, 2007; TEICHER; SAMSON, 2016.) The differentiation between active experiences of emotional abuse and more passive forms of neglect is also clinically important, since active patterns tend to have higher magnitudes of association with disorders, while neglect is linked to trajectories of social withdrawal and low self-esteem; this distinction guides hypotheses about mediations and moderators in responses to stress. (TAILLIEU et al., 2016.)

The family configuration of the case adds layers of risk. The absence of maternal emo-

tional attention organized relational insecurity and an intense search for validation, a condition that favors remaining in close ties even when manipulative intent is recognized. The father acts as a reference for co-regulation and perceptual confirmation, reducing the emotional cost of naming the abuse and sustaining critical vigilance. This arrangement explains the coexistence of lucidity and relational imprisonment: paternal support mitigates, without completely neutralizing, the chronic activation of stress circuits and the tendency toward accommodating responses to avoid loss of belonging. (MCEWEN, 2007; TEICHER; SAMSON, 2016; TAILLIEU et al., 2016.)

The functional effects become observable in school performance and attentional organization. In this case, complaints of fluctuating focus, cognitive fatigue and , and worsening performance on tasks requiring working memory and inhibitory control are reported, consistent with the literature describing the interference of prolonged stress on prefrontal circuits and on the neuroendocrine regulation of the HPA axis. (MCEWEN, 2007; TEICHER; SAMSON, 2016.) The score of 42/60 on the Relational Dynamics Inventory places the adolescent in the high-risk range, with an already established harmful pattern, and helps to interpret the maintenance of the bond through intermittent reinforcement, fear of social exclusion, and lack of safe relational alternatives.

There is also an intensified use of digital media as an immediate strategy for emotional relief and distraction. Clinically, this search for quick rewards can be interpreted as an attempt to compensate for emotional instability and internal vigilance overload, a predictable phenomenon when there is prolonged activation of stress systems and reduced prefrontal modulation, even without implying a specific diagnosis of dependence. (MCEWEN, 2007.)

In summary, the combination of a history of emotional neglect, a coalition of peers from the same family nucleus in gaslighting practices, and partial parental support explains the observed profile of internalizing symptoms, hypervigilance, and functional decline, anchored in well-described neurobiological mechanisms for chronic stressors in neurodevelopment. (TEICHER; SAMSON, 2016; TAILLIEU et al., 2016.)

STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS FOR COPING

Damage control begins with reducing relational allostatic load. The adolescent's routine should include supervised contact agreements, predictable schedules for necessary interactions, objective recording of episodes, and clear criteria for interrupting conversations when disqualifications or factual inversions arise. The father acts as a co-regulating figure and epistemic reference; regular meetings focused on validation, naming events, and training assertive responses reduce limbic reactivity and restore a sense of control. This environmental organization mitigates the chronic activation of stress axes and preserves executive resources for decision-making, in line with the neurobiology of chronic stress (MCEWEN, 2007).

The clinical intervention indicated for adolescents with symptoms related to psychological violence is Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy with caregiver participation. Trials in community services show the superiority of this approach over usual care in reducing post-traumatic and depressive symptoms, with maintenance in follow-up. The therapeutic core combines psychoeducation, restructuring of guilt beliefs, graded narrative exposure, and parental training, here focused on the father (JENSEN et al., 2013; GOLDBECK et al., 2016).

The transfer of care to everyday ecology re-

quires coordination with schools. A support plan with a focal point, simple monitoring metrics, and agreements to mitigate hostile exposures in shared spaces is recommended. Experiences of disseminating and implementing evidence-based practices for child and adolescent trauma in public networks indicate feasibility and clinical gains when there is supervision and standardized protocols (ORENGO-AGUAYO et al., 2022).

Behavioral hygiene complements clinical treatment. Sleep routines, reduction of digital environments that amplify social surveillance, blocks of deep attention for study, and respiratory self-regulation exercises should be prescribed in a structured manner, with the aim of reducing hypervigilance triggers, promoting memory consolidation unbiased by threat, and expanding adaptive emotional variability, which facilitates the gradual disengagement from the abusive bond (MCEWEN, 2007).

Periodic monitoring with the Relational Dynamics Inventory quantifies the clinical trajectory. Monthly reassessment is recommended for the first three months, followed by bimonthly reassessment. Consistent reductions in humiliation, invalidation, and cognitive manipulation signal therapeutic response and guide adjustments in family and school management, a practice aligned with the logic of implementing and monitoring evidence-based interventions for childhood trauma (ORENGO-AGUAYO et al., 2022).

In situations of escalating risk, safeguards are activated: diversification of living spaces, communication limits through short, recorded messages, the presence of a trusted adult at social events, and agreed escape routes. As the coping repertoire consolidates, controlled exposure to aggressors is reduced and the external support network expanded, a strategy compatible with TF-CBT protocols and with evidence of effectiveness in community services (JENSEN et al., 2013; GOLDBECK et al., 2016).

LEGAL ASPECTS

Brazil. Article 147-B of the Penal Code, included by Law No. 14,188/2021, classifies psychological violence against women as a crime punishable by imprisonment for 6 months to 2 years and a fine. When the acts occur in the domestic and family sphere, the protective measures of Law No. 11,340/2006 apply. If the perpetrator is under 18 years of age, there is no criminal liability, and socio-educational measures provided for in the Statute of the Child and Adolescent apply, such as warnings, community service, assisted freedom, semi-freedom, and internment. Incarceration has a maximum duration of three years, with periodic reassessment, pursuant to Article 121, § 3, of the ECA, and enforcement in accordance with the SINASE Law (BRAZIL, 2021; BRAZIL, 2006; BRAZIL, 1990; BRAZIL, 2012).

Portugal. Article 152 of the Penal Code defines domestic violence, including psychological abuse, with a basic prison sentence of 1 to 5 years, with legal aggravating factors depending on the outcome. Article 154-A defines stalking, with a prison sentence of up to 3 years or a fine, in addition to accessory penalties of prohibition of contact. For minors under 16 years of age, the Educational Guardianship Law applies, which provides for educational measures and the possibility of placement in an open, semi-open, or closed educational center, with a maximum duration of 2 years as a rule, which may reach 3 years in legal cases; from the age of 16, there is criminal responsibility, with special provisions for juveniles (PORTUGAL, Penal Code, art. 152; PORTUGAL, Penal Code, art. 154-A; PORTUGAL, 1999; PORTUGAL, DGRSP).

United Kingdom. Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 criminalizes controlling or coercive behavior in intimate or family relationships, with a maximum penalty of 5 years' imprisonment when tried on indictment, or up to 12 months' imprisonment and/

or a fine in summary proceedings. The statutory definition of domestic violence applies to persons aged 16 or over; conduct involving minors under the age of 16 is treated as child abuse under other frameworks. For offenders under the age of 18, juvenile justice guidelines apply, with rehabilitative orders and the possibility of a Detention and Training Order lasting between 4 and 24 months (UNITED KINGDOM, 2015; CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE, 2023; SENTENCING COUNCIL, 2018–2024; HOUSE OF COMMONS LIBRARY, 2024).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study organized psychological kidnapping as a useful descriptive category for close bonds without explicit physical violence, integrating gaslighting, affective invalidation, strategic positive reinforcement, and progressive isolation. The clinical narrative showed consistency between a history of maternal emotional neglect, fraternal coalition A1–A2, and maintenance of the bond due to a need for acceptance, with consciousness preserved by the paternal reference. Recent literature on public recognition of gaslighting and its linguistic markers supports the low detectability of the pattern and helps explain the persistence of the bond even in the face of clues of manipulation; the term psychological kidnapping is supported as an operational label when understood as a cumulative relational process. The findings converged with neurobiological models of chronic stress that describe amygdala hyperreactivity, modulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, and reduced efficiency of dorsolateral and ventromedial prefrontal control, a configuration that generates hypervigilance, affective lability, attentional rigidity, and defensive decision-making. This framework explains the coexistence of lucidity and relational imprisonment observed in the adolescent, in

line with reviews of stress physiology and the lasting effects of maltreatment on neurodevelopment.

The risk architecture combined attachment predispositions and peer domination strategies. Quantitative syntheses connect attachment insecurity to the perpetration of maltreatment in close relationships, while narcissistic traits are associated with patterns of exploitation and disqualification; in parallel, early emotional maltreatment increases the likelihood of internalizing symptoms. These axes provide an interpretive basis for the coordinated pattern of sisters A1–A2 and for the victim's vulnerability in the absence of maternal validation, with the father exercising co-regulation and perceptual confirmation. The Relational Dynamics Inventory contributed as a structured screening tool for the frequency and intensity of behaviors, incorporating five dimensions aligned with the literature and the case, including strategic positive reinforcement. The score of 42 out of 60 placed the adolescent in a high-risk zone, guiding clinical and school decisions. Therapeutic guidance is supported by evidence from TF-CBT with caregiver participation in community services and in a European multicenter trial, as well as guidelines for the implementation of evidence-based practices in public networks. The presence of the father as an active caregiver is a promising axis of intervention in the context of this case. Limitations arise from the single-case design and the initial use of the IDR without fully established psychometric properties. Next steps include content validation by expert, confirmatory factor analysis in adolescent samples, test-retest reliability assessment, and convergent validity study with related measures of gaslighting and coercive control. The literature on public recognition and linguistic markers provides a matrix for constructing more accurate items and cut-off criteria; replication in

diverse family and school contexts will allow for estimating generalization and sensitivity to change after intervention.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The nature of this case study, conducted in a clinical-family context, implies a preexisting closeness between the research team and the participant. To ensure the impartiality and objectivity of the analysis, the manuscript was fully reviewed by an external and independent reviewer.

ETHICAL APPROVAL AND CONSENT

Case report without intervention and with fully anonymized data. In accordance with the journal's guidelines, no review by an ethics committee was required. The participant's consent and the legal guardian's consent for publication were obtained in writing and remain on file at CPAH.

DATA AVAILABILITY

There is no associated public database. Raw records, consent forms, and an anonymized version of the IDR remain in the custody of the CPAH and can be made available to the editor on a confidential basis.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Author 1; Methodology: Author 1; Data curation: Author 1; Investigation: Author 1 and Co-author; Writing – draft: Author 1; Writing – review and editing: Author 1; Final approval: both.

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